

# Functions of Polarizations

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Toni: Welcome back everybody. I'm going to be continuing to talk in this segment about parts, managers, protectors in the system that get polarized. Who are both complimentary, but conflictual. Working with these parts does, I want to say take persistence and patience on the part of the therapist, because if you can imagine that parts are vying for power in the system, it's very, very important that we as therapists don't get enrolled in one side of that conflict against the other. Sometimes when we're teaching this in the training, we talk about the similarities of working with this polarizations as we would run our working with couples in couple therapy. Being able to remain self led, interested, curious, validating and understanding to both sides of the conflict is key, is critical. In this piece, I'm going to be talking to you today about the functions of polarizations. Why these parts get into conflict with each other.

I'm also going to be talking about the effect on the internal system when two parts are in conflict. As we've talked about before, our system is constantly seeking balance. When one part gains too much influence in one direction, others attempt to balance the system in the opposite direction. Now, on this slide, you can see two illustrations of how this works. One is a tug of war. The other is a sail boat. If you think about sailing, those of you that are sailing, you know that when a boat begins to heel too far to one side, the captain yells to everyone, "Get on the other side of the boat, so we can balance it out." That's just a way to hold that in your mind, that we're trying to balance the system. This would be the first function, is to balance the system.

Another function of polarizations is protection of exiles. If you have in our model, if we're working with protective parts, the rule is always there is an exile that is being protected. You never have a protector that runs alone. It's never by itself. This is something that's really, really important for all IFS therapists to remember, and to integrate, and to come back to over, and over, and over again. That when you're being presented with a big conflict of protectors, somewhere in the system that there's an exile that's being protected. Sometimes, if you have two different strategies of protection, those parts may both be trying to protect the same exile, or they each might be protecting an exile of their own. That's the investigation and the exploration that you will want to do. In my experience over the years, I have found that there's another function of the polarization, and that is to not just protect exiles, but to distract the client and the therapist from going deeper in the system.

Sometimes when you have parts in conflict and no one will stand down. Or you are asking parts to step back, and neither of them will step back, and more parts start coming in. The question to ask is, are these parts coming in as a distraction, or is it something that ... Is there something that very important that they have to, have to add to this conversation. I have heard many, many, many

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times after a long silence. This is a distraction. It is very distracting to keep a conflict going. If you think about, in the last segment, I asked you to think about a decision making process. Sometimes, we get stuck in a decision making process. I believe the reason that we get stuck there is because there's something deeper that needs to be heard, known, and understood, but these protectors don't want us to go there. I'm going to go back through these three again, because I think that it's important.

The functions of a conflictual, but complimentary struggle polarization. One to try to balance the system. Two, to protect exiles, and three, to potentially distract the client and the therapist from going deeper into the system. The only thing that I found over the years is what the conflict itself, the kind of impact that the conflict itself had on the system. Often, when a client presents to me with a tremendous amount of anxiety, the first thing that I will hold very, very lightly is there's an internal conflict. That there's an internal conflict between parts about what should I do? Where should I go? How should I handle this? What decision should I make? Is there a yes? Is there a no? There's another part that is getting more, and more anxious as this conflict stays stuck. In this illustration, you'll see, potentially the yes on one side, the no on the other side. Then there's a part that's trying to figure out what to do.

When I started to, again, hold this lightly, that when there was a strong conflict in the system, and there was a lot of anxiety, there was probably another part that was trying to figure it out. When I'm working with polarizations, this is the first part that I want to help people get in touch with if it's there. The anxiety that's being caused by the conflict. That part, we want to help that part understand that it actually can't figure out what to do. It doesn't have the capacity to figure this out. To help this part stand down, to relax, to soften, to move away, so that the self of the client can move in and help with this conflict. I'm just going to illustrate on the board, a client that I work with that illustrates this really well. My client presented with a part that was really, really angry. Angry and critical, we keep naming those parts, those critics. This part was very, very angry with everyone. A lot with her partner, and was just frustrated and angry with a lot of things that her partner was doing.

When I asked her if she wanted to focus on this part and get to know this part, she said yes. This became her target part. As she was focusing on it, what she noticed is there was another part that started to surface that said, "You better keep your mouth shut." Now, we have two parts. The part that's really angry and wants to speak, and another part that is saying don't speak. It really became a speak, don't speak, your feelings dilemma inside of her. I asked her if she would just pay a little bit of attention to the energy of both these parts, and what she discovered was a lot of anxiety. Because she did in fact, she did

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in fact have a part that was trying to figure out should she speak up and take somebody's head off. Or should she be quiet and not speak. She got in touch with a very anxious fixer. A part that was trying to convince either one of these parts to either do or not do their good idea for the conflict.

We had to spend some time just asking these parts to wait, which they were able to do, and have her focus on the anxiety and focus on part of her that was working really, really, really hard to mediate this conflict that was going on internally. Here, you see, the other triangle, in the slide you see a decision making yes, no, and the anxious part is trying to figure out what to do. In this example, you have a part that is angry and wants to speak, and a part that's afraid that says be quiet. There's also another anxious part here that is trying to mediate between them. This is a common phenomenon that I find all the time, these aren't the only examples of this, but anytime you're working with a polarization and there's a lot of anxiety, your going to want to think to yourself. There's another part that's trying to figure out what to do. That is the part that really needs help to be able to relax, and step back, so that the self of the client can become the mediator between the two polarized parts.

I'm going to end now, but we're going to be coming back to this in the next segment, where you'll have an opportunity to explore two of your own polarized parts. Thank you, and see you then.